

26<sup>th</sup> Sunday (A)

1<sup>st</sup> October 2017

‘Love in Action II: Dignity of the Human Person’

Ezek 18: *What the Lord does is unjust? Is it not what you do that is unjust?* Ps 24: Remember Your mercy, Lord. Phil 2: *He emptied Himself ... even to accepting death, death on a Cross* Mt 21:28–32: *“think better of it and believe in him”*

In the beautiful opening hymn today, we sang words taken from one of the psalms, Ps 138: *“For it was you who formed my inmost being, knit me together in my mother’s womb. I thank you who wonderfully made me.”* Throughout the Scriptures are such beautiful references to the wonder that is the created human being, “made in the image and likeness of God,” as Genesis puts it. We began last week our 6-week excursion through the riches of ‘Catholic Social Teaching,’ and looked at the basis of it in the gift of God’s good Creation. The pinnacle of Creation is mankind, and the truth about just ‘what is man?’ forms the foundation of our teaching about human dignity, and all the rest of social doctrine follows from that. So, we must rightly understand who God has created mankind to be, in order to proceed to examine the teaching of the coming weeks. If the human person is not that immortal God-willed

creature of body and soul, then he does not possess that irreplaceable dignity and preciousness of life that we claim. Pope St John Paul II said, “The main thread, and the guiding principle ... of all of the Church’s social doctrine is a correct view of the human person and of his unique value.”

Mankind ranks higher than all the rest of material creation precisely because he is *not* only material: he is also spiritual, possessing an immortal soul that is not only ordered to this earthly life, but is created for heavenly life. It is for this reason that the fundamental human right is what we often refer to as the ‘right to life’ — that there is a ‘sanctity of human life’ that we must always respect and defend from to natural death. So much follows from this, especially in regard to the weakest and most vulnerable in our society, particularly the unborn child, those people who have disabilities, and the frail sick and elderly. Each has a inviolable right to life, which no-one can take from him or her: this is why abortion, the screening out of disabled people, and euthanasia are all morally wrong. As Catholics, we cannot be anything other than 100% pro-life. We may

not deprive someone of their life, except literally as a last resort to defend our life from an aggressor. But the innocent unborn child, including those with some congenital disability or medical condition are to be protected and valued along with every other member of society. Likewise, the frail elderly are to be cared for properly until their natural death, and not hastened towards their death by lethal interventions. If we cannot care for these, the most vulnerable in the community, then other levels of prejudice against members of the human family are bound to follow.

Our being made in God's image and likeness also means that there is an equality inherent in all the members of the human race. We are all related — all 7bn of us — as descendants of that original human couple who were given spiritual human souls by God at the dawn of history some 100,000yrs ago. Being one human family, whatever our ethnic origin, is key to eliminating racism and other forms of prejudice. Pope Francis has said, "In God's family, where all are sons and daughters of the same Father, there are no 'disposable lives.' All men and women enjoy an

equal and inviolable dignity. All are loved by God. All have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. ... This is the reason why no-one can remain indifferent before the lot of our brothers and sisters." We need to live this out every day, in the way we treat others. Sometimes this may be in a life-or-death situation, perhaps saving a baby from the threat of abortion; sometimes it may be in simply choosing to speak in a civilized and respectful way to some stranger who has crossed us. St Paul in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading today has some wise words for us as we try to live out this teaching of the dignity of the human person: "*There must be no competition amongst you, no conceit ... Always consider the other person to be better than yourself, so that nobody thinks of his own interests first, but everybody thinks of other people's interests instead.*"

As last week, I'd like to put before you a final question, to reflect on this week: ***In what ways do I typically not respect the innate dignity of others? What attitudes do I need to change to see the human family as God sees it: flawed, but in such need of loving respect?***